



## CRACK COCAINE\*

Second only to heroin, crack is considered the drug contributing to the most serious consequences by 21 sources in 14 cities: Boston, New York, and Philadelphia in the Northeast; all 7 *Pulse Check* cities in the South; Detroit, Chicago, and St. Louis in the Midwest; and Los Angeles in the West—a region where most sources identify methamphetamine as the most serious drug problem. In

nine of the cities (Chicago, Columbia [SC], Detroit, Los Angeles, Memphis, Miami, New Orleans, New York, and Washington, DC) where crack is named as the drug contributing to the most serious consequences, sources also consider it the most widely used illicit drug.

Compared with the last reporting period, crack replaced marijuana as the most widely used drug according to the epidemiologic source in

Memphis. By contrast, heroin replaced crack as the most widely used drug, according to the epidemiologic source in New Orleans, and heroin replaced crack as the drug contributing to the most serious consequences according to the non-methadone source in Washington, DC.

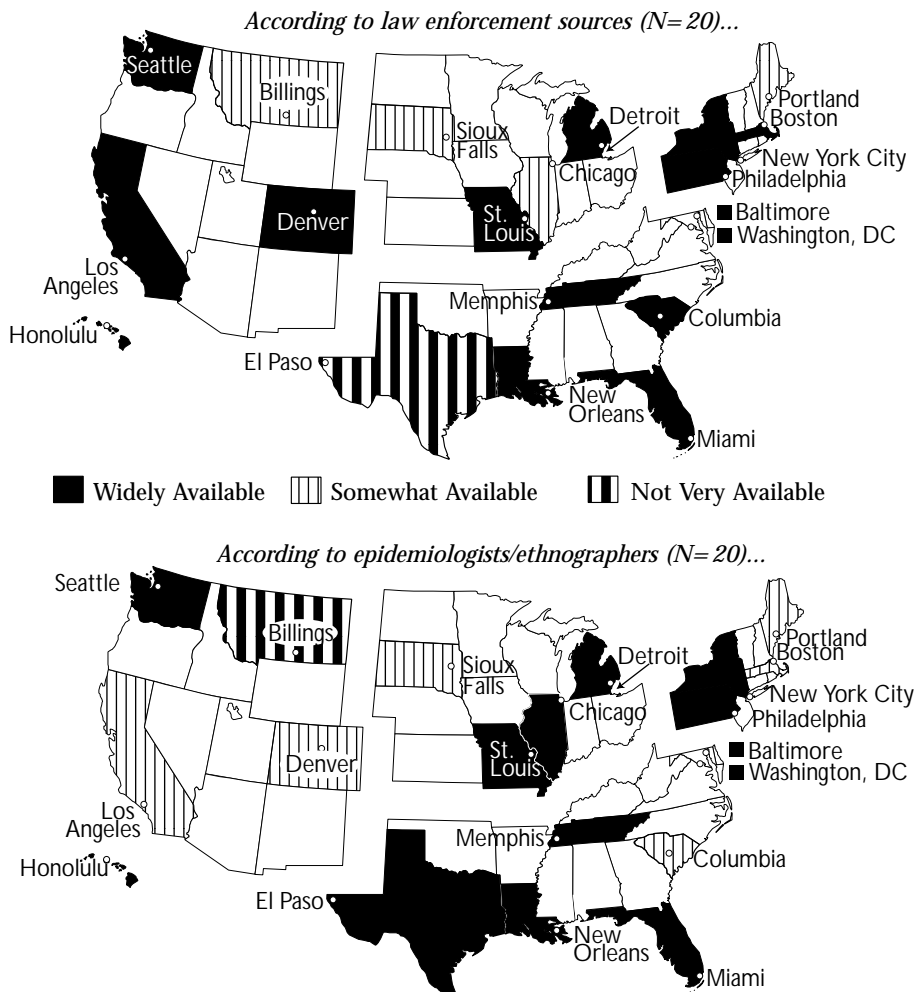
### CRACK: THE DRUG

How available is crack cocaine across the country? (*Exhibits 1 and 2*) The majority of law enforcement (15 of 20) and epidemiologic/ethnographic (13 of 20) sources continue to consider crack widely available in their communities. Except for two sources (El Paso<sup>L</sup> and Billings<sup>E</sup>) who identify crack as not very available, the remaining sources consider it somewhat available.

As in the last *Pulse Check*, according to most law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic sources, crack availability remained stable between fall 2001 and spring 2002, with declines noted by five sources in four cities (Boston, Honolulu, Philadelphia, and Seattle), and increases noted by four sources in four cities (Billings, Memphis, New York, and Sioux Falls).

How and where is crack cocaine made? Crack continues to be processed locally (from powder cocaine) in most *Pulse Check* cities, either by local distributors or by users. According to most sources, crack is processed locally because Federal guidelines for distributing crack are stricter than for powder; therefore, dealers would rather transport powder cocaine than crack.

**Exhibit 1.**  
How available is crack cocaine across the 20 Pulse Check cities (spring 2002)?



\*The following symbols appear throughout this chapter to indicate type of respondent: <sup>L</sup>Law enforcement respondent, <sup>E</sup>Epidemiologic/ethnographic respondent, <sup>N</sup>Non-methadone treatment respondent, and <sup>M</sup>Methadone treatment respondent.



However, many sources, especially in the West, report crack as processed prior to arriving in their communities, including sources in Billings, Denver, El Paso, Honolulu, Portland (ME), Seattle, and Sioux Falls.

What are crack prices and purity levels across the country?

(Exhibit 3) As reported in past *Pulse Checks*, crack prices remained stable in most cities, with exceptions in Los Angeles and Memphis, where prices declined. Crack is commonly sold by the rock (typically 0.1–0.2 grams) for \$10–\$20, respectively. Only a few street-level purity percentages are reported, and most are stable since the last reporting period:

- **Los Angeles, CA<sup>E</sup>**: 80–85 percent pure
- **New York, NY<sup>L</sup>**: 58 percent pure (up)
- **Philadelphia, PA<sup>L</sup>**: 80 percent pure
- **Portland, ME<sup>L</sup>**: 80 percent pure
- **Seattle, WA<sup>L,E</sup>**: 40–85 percent pure
- **Washington, DC<sup>L</sup>**: 30–60 percent pure

According to the law enforcement source in Memphis, in spring 2002, heroin traces were found in crack and powder cocaine seized by law enforcement, especially in the larger quantities seized. *Pulse Check* will continue to monitor this finding in upcoming issues.

How is crack referred to?

(Exhibit 4) Few slang terms are reported as new in spring 2002, further indicating the relatively stable crack market across the country. New terms include “CDs” in the Northeast and “space” in the South.

## Exhibit 2.

How has crack cocaine availability changed (fall 2001 vs spring 2002)?



How is crack packaged and marketed? In most cities, crack is packaged in a variety of ways. The most commonly reported packaging across all four regions remains small, plastic, cellophane, glassine, or coin bags, often the “zipper” type. Often crack is placed in a torn corner of a baggie and knotted (“Dominican knot”), folded in paper or magazine pages (“bindles”), or pieces of crack (“rocks”) are sold without packaging (“loose”). Vials and aluminum foil are also common forms of packaging.

Similar to other marketing characteristics, few changes are noted in the packaging of crack cocaine. The New

York epidemiologic source notes that, since fall 2001, packaging has switched from vials to colored baggies, with the colors representing crack purity or specific dealers. Only in one other city (Baltimore) are labels used—in that city, colored tops are used on vials of crack to identify dealers.

## CRACK: THE MARKET

Who sells crack? Crack sellers are equally likely to be independent or organized (often as street gangs), and sources in six cities report independent and organized sellers as equally represented. Young adults continue to be the primary sellers in most cities, but adolescents are mentioned in six cities: Baltimore<sup>L,E</sup>, Chicago<sup>E</sup>, Columbia (SC)<sup>L</sup>, Los Angeles<sup>L,E</sup>, Memphis<sup>E</sup>, and Seattle<sup>L</sup>. Older adults are mentioned in five cities: Boston<sup>L,E</sup>, Honolulu<sup>E</sup>, Philadelphia<sup>L</sup>, Sioux Falls<sup>L</sup>, and St. Louis<sup>L</sup>. Law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic sources report no new seller groups since the last *Pulse Check*, further suggesting a stable crack market.

Similar to percentages for heroin and powder cocaine, about one-third of law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic respondents report crack sellers as very likely to use the drug, and one-third report them as somewhat likely to use the drug (see *Highlights Exhibit 8*). The law enforcement source in El Paso explains that sellers process the crack because they are likely to use it. The Miami law enforcement source explains that in the city most street-level dealers are users, but county-wide, dealers don’t use their own inventories. In Columbia<sup>L</sup>, sellers commonly smoke marijuana blunts.



How is crack marketed? Similar to marketing techniques for heroin, crack sales methods vary widely. In many cities, such as Boston, Columbia (SC), El Paso, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC, the particular technique for selling crack is identical to selling heroin. Many sources (in Columbia, El Paso, Memphis, Miami, Portland [ME], and Sioux Falls) report prearranged meetings for the exchange of crack. Open-air markets for crack are reported in seven cities (Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Honolulu, New Orleans, Seattle, and Washington, DC), and home delivery of the drug is reported in Boston and Miami. The law enforcement source in Sioux Falls points out that crack sellers avoid vulnerability to law enforcement by withholding large amounts of their crack inventory ("the stash") from the street market. Since fall 2001, changes in marketing techniques are rare: in Boston<sup>L</sup>, crack sales continue to be more "underground" than before, with more beeper and cell phone use.

What other drugs do crack dealers sell? No other drugs are reported as sold by crack dealers in Boston, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, but in most cities crack dealers sell other drugs, especially heroin, powder cocaine, and marijuana:

■ **Heroin sold by crack dealers:**

Baltimore<sup>E</sup>, Chicago<sup>E</sup>, Denver<sup>E</sup>, Memphis<sup>E</sup>, Miami<sup>E</sup>, New York<sup>L</sup>, New Orleans<sup>E</sup>, Portland (ME)<sup>E</sup>, and St. Louis<sup>E</sup>

■ **Powder cocaine sold by crack**

**dealers:** Billings<sup>L</sup>, Chicago<sup>E</sup>, Denver<sup>E</sup>, El Paso<sup>E</sup>, Memphis<sup>E</sup>, Miami<sup>L</sup>, and New York<sup>L</sup>

**Exhibit 3.**

**What are crack cocaine price levels in 19 *Pulse Check* cities?\***

MOST COMMON STREET UNIT				
	City/Source	Unit	Size	Price
Northeast	Boston, MA <sup>E</sup>	1 g	1 g	\$50
		rock	NR	\$20
	Boston, MA <sup>L</sup>	"jum" (small rock)	0.1 g	\$10
	New York, NY <sup>E</sup>	bag	NR	\$5–\$10
	New York, NY <sup>L</sup>	rock, vial	NR	\$20
		1 g	1 g	\$24–\$30
	Philadelphia, PA <sup>E</sup>	rock	NR	\$5
		"trey" 5-mm diameter rock		\$3 or two for \$5
	Philadelphia, PA <sup>L</sup>	rock	0.1–0.5 oz	\$50
	Portland, ME <sup>L</sup>	rock	0.5 g	\$100
South	Baltimore, MD <sup>E</sup>	rock	NR	\$5–\$10
	Baltimore, MD <sup>L</sup>	rock	NR	\$10
	Columbia, SC <sup>L</sup>	rock	NR	\$20
		1 g	1 g	\$100
	El Paso, TX <sup>L,E</sup>	rock	0.25 g	\$20
	Memphis, TN <sup>E</sup>	rock	medium sized	\$5
	Memphis, TN <sup>L</sup>	rock	0.2 g	\$20
	Miami, FL <sup>L</sup>	rock	NR	\$10–\$20
	New Orleans, LA <sup>L,E</sup>	rock	0.25–0.48 g	\$10–\$20
	Washington, DC <sup>L,E</sup>	rock, "dime bag"	75 mg	\$10
	Washington, DC <sup>L</sup>	1 g	1 g	\$100
Midwest	Chicago, IL <sup>E</sup>	rock	NR	\$5–\$20
		1 g	1 g	\$50–\$150
	Chicago, IL <sup>L</sup>	rock	0.2 g	\$20–\$25
		1 g	1 g	\$123
	Detroit, MI <sup>E</sup>	rock	NR	\$20
	Detroit, MI <sup>L</sup>	rock	0.1 g	\$10
	Sioux Falls, SD <sup>L</sup>	rock	small	\$100
	St. Louis, IL <sup>L,E</sup>	rock	NR	\$20
	1 g	1 g	\$300–\$400	
West	Denver, CO <sup>E</sup>	rock	NR	\$20–\$30
	Denver, CO <sup>L</sup>	rock	0.1–0.2 g	\$20
		1 oz	1 oz	\$950–\$1,250
	Honolulu, HI <sup>E</sup>	0.25 g	0.25 g	\$25–\$35
	Honolulu, HI <sup>L</sup>	rock	0.25 g	\$25–\$30
		1 g	1 g	\$100–\$250
	Los Angeles, CA <sup>E</sup>	1 oz	1 oz	\$600–\$700
		1 g	1 g	\$80
	Los Angeles, CA <sup>L</sup>	rock	0.2 g	\$10
	Seattle, WA <sup>E</sup>	rock	NR	\$2, \$5, and \$10
	Seattle, WA <sup>L,E</sup>	1 g	1 g	\$100

\*Sources in Billings did not provide this information.

NR=Not reported

Sources: Law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic sources

- **Marijuana sold by crack dealers:** Baltimore<sup>E</sup>, Columbia (SC)<sup>L</sup>, Denver<sup>L,E</sup>, Detroit<sup>E</sup>, El Paso<sup>E</sup>, Honolulu<sup>L</sup>, Miami<sup>L,E</sup>, New York<sup>L</sup>, Portland<sup>E</sup>, St. Louis<sup>L,E</sup>, Sioux Falls<sup>L</sup>, and Washington, DC<sup>L</sup>
- **Ecstasy sold by crack dealers:** Denver<sup>L</sup>, Miami<sup>E</sup>, New York<sup>L</sup>, and Washington, DC<sup>L</sup>
- **Methamphetamine sold by crack dealers:** Billings<sup>L</sup>, Denver<sup>L,E</sup>, and Honolulu<sup>L</sup>
- **OxyContin<sup>®</sup> sold by crack dealers:** Miami<sup>L</sup>

Since the last *Pulse Check*, only one change was reported in drugs sold by crack dealers: in Baltimore, marijuana is now sold by crack dealers.

What types of crimes are related to crack sales? Crack sales are associated with prostitution, gang-related crimes, and violent crimes, more so than any other drug sales, according to the majority of law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic respondents (see *Highlights Exhibit 7*). Violent crimes include armed robberies in Chicago, New York, St. Louis, and Sioux Falls; assaults in New York and Washington, DC; street robberies in Los Angeles; and turf wars in Sioux Falls. No

## Exhibit 4.

How is crack cocaine referred to in the four regions of the country?\*



\*Names in all caps are new this reporting period.

Sources: Law enforcement, epidemiologic/ethnographic, and treatment respondents

changes have been reported since fall 2001.

Where are crack markets located? More than two-thirds (23 of 33) of law enforcement and epidemiologic/ethnographic respondents across the Nation report central city areas as the primary location of crack sales. Markets are located primarily in suburban areas in El Paso; in central city and suburban areas in Los Angeles, Miami, and Portland (ME); and in all areas (central city, rural, and suburban areas) in Denver, Detroit, Memphis, New Orleans, and New York. The most common sales settings

for crack remain streets (mentioned by all 20 law enforcement sources), crack houses, private residences, and around public housing projects.

Since the last reporting period, crack sales have moved predominantly into the central city areas of Memphis, and are spreading to all areas of New Orleans. In Philadelphia<sup>L</sup>, crack sales have increasingly moved indoors and even outdoor sales are constantly moving from street corner to street corner to avoid law enforcement. In Portland, new crack sales locations since fall 2001 include crack houses and hotels or motels.

## Marketing techniques in the East...

- **Baltimore, MD<sup>E</sup>:** "Touters" stand on the street and advertise crack by referring to the colored tops on the vials in which crack is packaged: "black tops are good today." The colors of the vial tops change daily, and the sales locations move daily to avoid law enforcement.
- **Philadelphia, PA<sup>L</sup>:** Most crack sellers are organized as small, loose confederations of individuals who work together for specific transactions, go their separate ways, and then re-form, making them difficult to track. Furthermore, Philadelphia streets are divided into neighborhoods and blocks, with someone "controlling" a particular block or neighborhood. If a dealer wants to sell a certain drug, he or she pays "rent" to the person who controls the area. This practice helps dealers evade law enforcement and often results in violent turf wars.



## CRACK: USERS

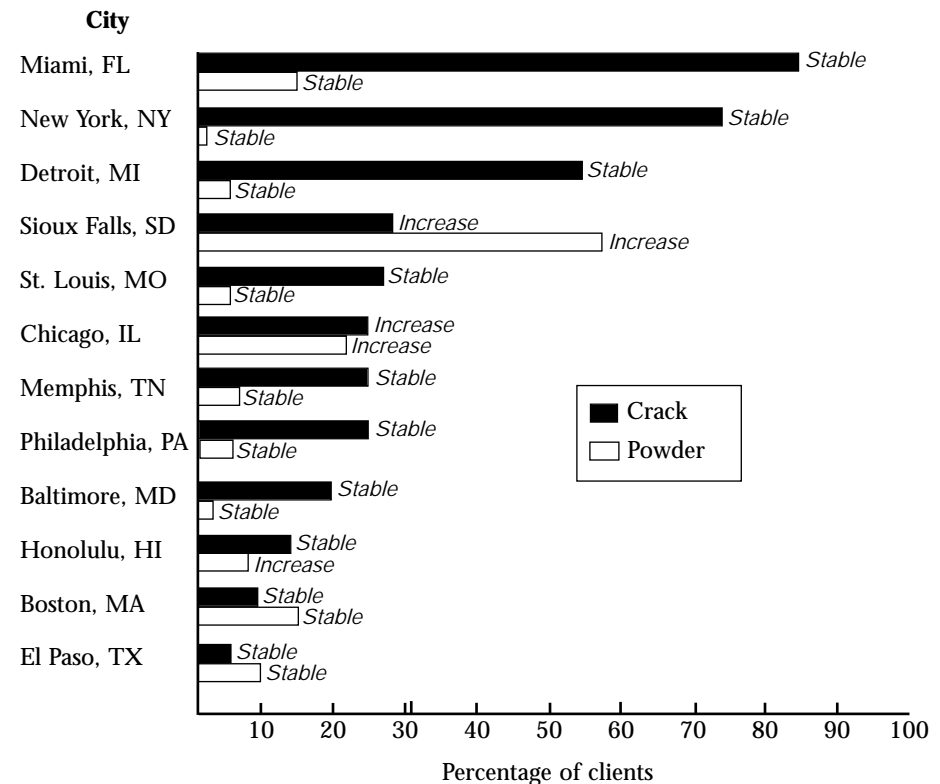
How many crack users are in treatment? (*Exhibit 5*) Primary crack users constitute at least 10 percent of non-methadone treatment clients in 11 cities, with a high of 85 percent in Miami. Proportions of crack clients between fall 2001 and spring 2002 remained relatively stable in most cities, with several exceptions: increases are reported in five cities (Chicago<sup>N</sup>, Columbia [SC]<sup>N</sup>, Memphis<sup>E</sup>, St. Louis<sup>M</sup>, and Sioux Falls<sup>N</sup>), and declines are reported in seven cities, mostly by epidemiologic sources (in Boston<sup>E</sup>, Columbia<sup>E</sup>, Denver<sup>E,N</sup>, Honolulu<sup>E</sup>, Miami<sup>E</sup>, Philadelphia<sup>E</sup>, and Portland [ME]<sup>N</sup>). The epidemiologic source in Columbia states that the decrease in crack users may be related to users switching to other drugs, especially pharmaceutical opiates. The methadone treatment source in St. Louis reports that crack use as a secondary or tertiary drug has increased. Similarly, the methadone treatment source in Columbia reports that positive urinalyses for crack have increased. Drug users in that city often stay up all night using crack and visit methadone clinics the next morning for a "methadone crash."

Who uses crack? (*Exhibit 6*) The majority of epidemiologic/ethnographic and treatment sources report that crack users remain young adult (18–30 years), central city residents from low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, sources cite adolescents as the primary crack users in Billings<sup>N</sup> (along with young adults), Los Angeles<sup>N</sup> (along with young adults), and Sioux Falls<sup>N</sup>. Mean age of primary crack users ranges from 23 years in Boston to 39 years in Chicago.

Crack users are predominantly male, according to 75 percent (15 of 20)

## Exhibit 5.

Which non-methadone treatment programs in *Pulse Check* cities have substantial percentages\* of clients reporting crack or powder cocaine as their primary drug of abuse? How have those percentages changed (fall 2001 vs spring 2002)?\*\*



\*10 percent or more for either crack or powder cocaine

\*\*Non-methadone treatment sources did not respond in Billings, Denver, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and Washington, DC.

of epidemiologic sources, although the gender gap is narrowing in several cities. For example, in Boston, Columbia (SC), Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Seattle, about 40 percent of crack users are female. Blacks continue to be twice as likely as Whites to be reported as the predominant user group. Crack users in treatment tend to be court referred and unemployed. Slightly more than half have completed high school.

Overall, the number of crack users has remained relatively stable as a group since the last *Pulse Check* reporting period, with only a few

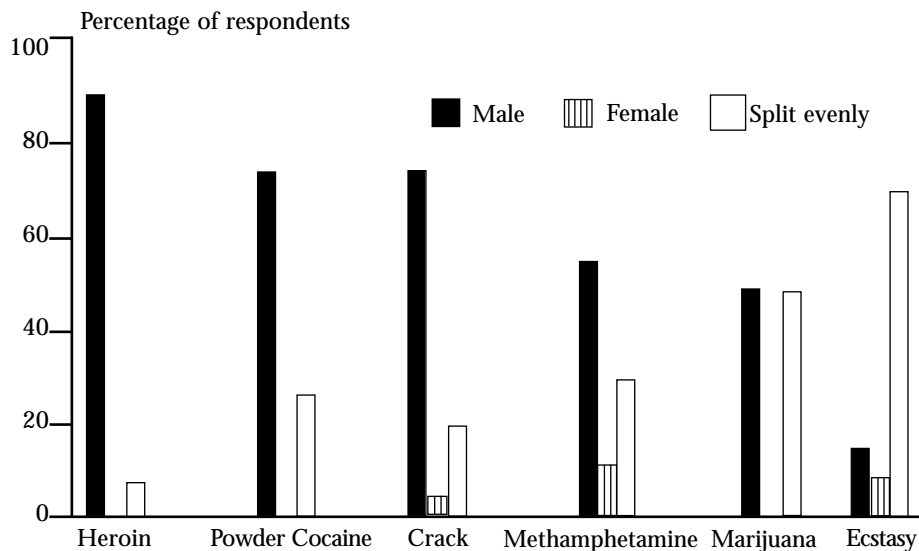
changes in age, gender, race/ethnicity, and residence area, as noted on the following page.

How do users take crack cocaine? Nearly all epidemiologic/ethnographic and treatment respondents (48 of 52) report that crack users primarily smoke the drug. However, injecting is the primary route of administration according to methadone treatment sources in Columbia (SC) and Memphis; injecting and smoking are evenly split as routes of administration according to sources in Billings<sup>N</sup> and Seattle<sup>E</sup>.



## CRACK COCAINE

Exhibit 6. Which genders are the predominant users of specific drugs in the Pulse Check cities?



Source: Epidemiologic/ethnographic respondents

Except in Billings, where crack injection has increased since fall 2001, no changes in routes of crack administration are reported.

What other drugs do crack users take? Other drugs taken by crack users vary widely, with heroin and

marijuana topping the list, and prescription drugs, such as benzodiazepines or pharmaceutical opiates, commonly reported:

- **Heroin taken in combination with crack ("speedball"):** Baltimore<sup>M</sup>, Boston<sup>E</sup>, Chicago<sup>E,M</sup>, Columbia

(SC)<sup>M</sup>, Denver<sup>N</sup>, Detroit<sup>M</sup>, Honolulu<sup>N</sup>, Miami<sup>E,M</sup>, New Orleans<sup>E</sup>, New York<sup>E,M</sup>, Philadelphia<sup>E</sup>, Portland (ME)<sup>N</sup>, and Seattle<sup>E,M</sup>

- **Marijuana taken in combination with crack in a blunt or joint, or sequentially to mitigate the crack effects:** Baltimore<sup>E</sup>, Billings<sup>N</sup>, Boston<sup>E</sup>, Columbia<sup>E</sup>, Denver<sup>E</sup>, Detroit<sup>E,N</sup>, El Paso<sup>E</sup>, Honolulu<sup>E,N</sup>, Los Angeles<sup>E,N</sup>, Memphis<sup>E,N,M</sup>, New York<sup>N</sup>, New Orleans<sup>E</sup>, Philadelphia<sup>E,N</sup>, Portland<sup>E</sup>, St. Louis<sup>E</sup>, and Seattle<sup>N</sup>
- **Benzodiazepines taken sequentially:** Boston<sup>E</sup>, Memphis<sup>N,M</sup>, Miami<sup>E</sup>, Philadelphia<sup>N</sup>, and Portland<sup>E</sup>
- **Pharmaceutical opiates taken sequentially:** Baltimore<sup>M</sup>, Memphis<sup>M</sup>, Philadelphia<sup>N</sup>, Portland<sup>N</sup>, and Seattle<sup>M</sup>

Other combinations include PCP with crack ("space basing") in New York, and methamphetamine in Honolulu. The non-methadone treatment source in Billings reports an increase in prescription drug use among crack users since the last reporting period.

The nature of crack users has changed only slightly (fall 2001 vs spring 2002)...

*Users are aging in some cities, but younger users are reported in others:*

- **Memphis, TN<sup>N</sup>:** Even though young adults (18–30 years) predominate, crack users are aging.
- **Miami, FL<sup>E</sup>:** Predominant crack users are adults (> 30 years) who continue to age.
- **Billings, MT<sup>N</sup>:** Adolescents and young adults predominate, but adolescents are increasingly using the drug.
- **Los Angeles, CA<sup>E</sup>:** Although adults predominate, younger users (late twenties) are increasing.
- **Sioux Falls, SD<sup>N</sup>:** Adolescents (13–18 years) predominate, but users are increasingly younger (< 13 years).

*Gender shifts are reported in only two cities:*

- **Sioux Falls, SD<sup>N</sup>:** Crack users used to be primarily males but are now evenly split between the genders.
- **Washington, DC<sup>E</sup>:** Young black females have been increasingly using crack.

*Only one change is reported in race/ethnicity and geographic residence:*

- **Sioux Falls, SD<sup>N</sup>:** The predominant crack users are Whites and American Indians, but American Indians have increased since fall 2001. Similarly, both central city and rural areas predominate as residences, but crack use is becoming more common on American Indian reservations in rural areas.



Similarly, the non-methadone treatment source in Memphis notes an increase in sequential benzodiazepine use among crack users.

Where and with whom is crack used? As reported in past issues, crack generally tends to be used in private and in small groups or among

friends, as reported by the majority of epidemiologic/ethnographic and treatment sources. It also continues to be used mostly in the streets, crack houses, private residences, and public housing developments. Other settings include homeless shelters, public restrooms, abandoned lots, and alleys in Boston; vacant lots and buildings in

Philadelphia; and adult video stores in Honolulu. Sources report few changes since fall 2001: in Memphis, restaurants are a new use and sales setting for crack; in St. Louis, sales and use activity in parks has increased; and in Honolulu, use in public housing developments has declined due to policing.



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